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Gender Control of Resources and Intra-Household Food Production in Chepalungu Sub-County, Bomet County, Kenya

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Abstract
Access to and control over productive resources constitutes important determinants of socio-cultural dynamics and how household members participate in agricultural activities and contribute to food production within smallholder farming systems. This paper examines gender control of resources and intra-household food production in Chepalungu Sub-County, Bomet County, Kenya. The study adopted a qualitative research design based on 45 in-depth interviews with 23 women and 22 men plus three Key Informant Interviews. Participants were purposively selected, and the interview data were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach. The analysis focused on participants' accounts of ownership, access, use, management, decision-making, control, and benefits associated with productive resource. The findings indicate that participants commonly described land ownership and major agricultural financial decisions as male-dominated, while women's access to inputs and credit was often mediated by male household members. Participants also described situations in which women contributed substantial labour but had limited authority over the use of agricultural income. Some participants associated more shared control of resources with greater participation in decisions concerning food crops, household expenditures, and small-scale agricultural activities. These findings are attributed to socio-cultural norms such as patriarchal system among the Kipsigis. However, these accounts represent participants' perceptions and experiences and do not provide direct measures of agricultural yields, dietary diversity, household food security scores, expenditure, or causal effects. The article therefore interprets the findings as context-specific qualitative evidence of gendered resource-control practices rather than as estimates of prevalence or causal impacts.

Introduction
Control of productive resources, including land, agricultural inputs, credit, and income, is an important dimension of intra-household food production in smallholder farming systems. In this article, intra-household food production refers to the processes through which household members allocate land, labour, inputs, finance, knowledge, and decision-making authority to produce food primarily for household use, whether production is undertaken individually, jointly, or through

negotiated household arrangements. The term therefore concerns both production activities and the household relations through which resources and production decisions are organised (Palacios-Lopez et al., 2017).

Regionally, the impact of women's resource-control varies depending on customary norms, legal frameworks, and intra-household bargaining patterns (Schling, 2024). Although tenure reform and land registration improve formal ownership, these interventions alone cannot ensure equitable intra-household bargaining power without accompanying changes in social norms and economic opportunities (Henderson et al., 2024). Research across East Africa shows that enhancing women's decision-making power and market access positively correlates with on farm production diversity and dietary diversity (Connors et al., 2023).

Gendered resource relations can be understood more precisely by distinguishing ownership, access, use, management, decision-making, control, and benefit. Ownership refers to a person's recognised rights over a resource; access refers to the opportunity to obtain or use it; use concerns the actual utilisation of the resource; management concerns day-to-day administration; decision-making refers to participation in determining how a resource is used; control refers to the authority to make or enforce consequential decisions; and benefit refers to the ability to receive or influence the use of returns generated from the resource. These dimensions may overlap, but they are not synonymous. A person may have access to land without owning it, participate in farm work without controlling the resulting income, or be formally named on a loan without determining how the borrowed funds are used.

Women make substantial contributions to agricultural labour in many smallholder systems, while gender differences in land rights, agricultural inputs, financial services, and decision-making can shape the conditions under which that labour is performed. Evidence also cautions against treating commonly repeated statistics about women's agricultural contribution as universal facts; measurement varies across countries, crops, activities, and definitions of agricultural work. (Doss et al., 2018; Palacios-Lopez et al., 2017).

However, according to UN Women (2023)**,** Kenyan women spend nearly five times more time on unpaid domestic and care work than men, averaging five hours daily compared to men's one hour. This imbalance reduces their capacity to engage fully in productive agricultural activities Research on intra-household decision-making further shows that spouses may report different understandings of who has authority over particular household and agricultural decisions (Anderson et al., 2017). These observations make it important to examine resource-control as a set of distinct household practices rather than as a single gender variable.

In Chepalungu Sub-County, the present study focuses on how men and women describe their experiences of resource ownership, access, use, management, decision-making, control, and benefit within household food production activities. The study addresses the following research question: How do men and women describe the role of gendered resource-control in intra-household food production in Chepalungu Sub-County, Bomet County?

For analytical purposes, the study treats resource-control as multidimensional. Land ownership captures formal or recognised rights; access captures the ability to obtain and use land, inputs, credit, or income; use concerns actual utilisation; management concerns administration of resources and production activities; decision-making concerns participation in choices such as what to plant or whether to sell produce; control concerns final authority over those choices; and benefit concerns who receives or determines the use of returns. Intra-household food production refers to household processes of producing food and allocating labour and productive resources for household consumption. These distinctions guided the interview prompts and the coding of participants' accounts.

Gendered Ownership and Access to Land

Land is a central productive resource in agrarian households, but formal ownership does not necessarily capture the full range of land rights exercised by household members. Doss et al. (2015) show that measures of women's land rights vary depending on whether ownership, documentation, use, or decision-making is considered. Slavchevska et al. (2021) similarly argue that examining land rights beyond ownership is necessary because women may have use rights without secure or independent decision-making authority. Intra-household accounts also indicate that authority over agricultural decisions can differ between spouses, making it important to distinguish formal rights from actual control (Anderson et al., 2017).

Research on women's access to productive resources also indicates that access alone does not guarantee control or benefits. Quisumbing and Pandolfelli (2010) reviewed interventions intended to improve poor women's access to productive resources and emphasised the importance of delivery mechanisms, gender roles, and context. In relation to agricultural labour, Palacios-Lopez et al. (2017) caution against assuming that women perform a uniform share of agricultural work across settings and show that women's labour contributions vary by country, crop, and activity. These findings support a more precise examination of how household members access and use agricultural inputs rather than inferring productivity outcomes from reported access.

At the national level in Kenya, gender differences in agricultural participation and access to productive resources provide an important context for understanding intra-household food production. Examining these differences helps to explain how gender roles and resource-control may shape participation, decision-making and the allocation of resources within farming households. Customary laws and socio-cultural norms continue to restrict women's capacity to register land or use it as collateral for credit, undermining their ability to invest in long-term agricultural improvements. Mwenzwa et al. (2018) found that women's limited land access in Kenya's drylands significantly reduced household food security, while Auya et al. (2022) linked land subdivision in Nyamira to declining productivity and household food insecurity.

Women's access to credit is another dimension of household resource relations. Access to a loan may differ from control over the borrowed funds, particularly where household members negotiate or contest how loans are used. Quisumbing and Pandolfelli (2010) note that interventions that increase women's access to productive resources need to consider household power relations and context. Brody et al. (2017), in a systematic review of self-help group programmes, similarly show that financial and group-based interventions do not automatically produce uniform empowerment outcomes. The present study therefore examines credit in terms of access, use, decision-making, and control rather than treating receipt of a loan as equivalent to financial autonomy.

Access to Agricultural Inputs

Access to quality agricultural inputs including seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, and farming tools constitutes a major determinant of smallholder productivity. Global evidence consistently shows that women farmers face higher effective input costs, weaker supply chains, and reduced access to agricultural information due to systemic and gendered barriers (FAO, 2019).

Gender differentials in fertiliser and pesticide use remain stark across sub-Saharan Africa. In Ethiopia, gender differences in the use of agricultural inputs contributed substantially to the productivity gap between male- and female-managed farm plots (UN Women, 2019). In Tanzania, gender gaps in chemical input use persist due to women's restricted market access. Male-centric extension systems in

Kenya compound this issue by excluding women from training and technology dissemination networks (Meighan, 2024). Ricker-Gilbert et al. (2024) notes that access to input credit is strongly associated with education, farm size, and cooperative membership, but smallholder women remain disadvantaged by limited financing and institutional support across all these dimensions.

Mayanja et al. (2014) observes that awareness and affordability of new crop varieties are heavily influenced by gender roles, further constraining women's ability to benefit from varietal improvement programmes.

Access to Credit and Financial Services

Access to credit and financial services profoundly affects intra-household control of resources and agricultural productivity. Globally, access to financial services has improved considerably, although significant gender disparities persist. Structural inequalities, including lack of collateral, gender bias in lending practices, and limited financial literacy, restrict women's ability to invest in productive assets and capitalise on market opportunities. The World Bank (2022) reported that 1.4 billion adults worldwide remain unbanked in 2021, of whom 740 million (54%) were women, underscoring the persistent depth of barriers to women's financial inclusion.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, women's access to agricultural credit is constrained by limited collateral and other financial and institutional barriers, which can restrict their ability to obtain resources for agricultural production (Ingutia & Sumelius, 2024). Microfinance programmes have improved access for some women, but often fall short of addressing intra-household decision-making inequalities that determine how borrowed funds are ultimately used (Mwangi et al., 2023). In Kenya, only 28 percent of rural women have access to formal credit compared to 46 percent of men, with title deeds typically held by men serving as collateral and thereby centralising control of agricultural loans in male hands (KNBS, 2023).

A critical concern documented across multiple contexts is the phenomenon of loan diversion, wherein funds borrowed in women's names are appropriated by husbands without genuine spousal consent. Research indicates that 30 to 50 percent of loans to married women in patriarchal contexts are partially or fully redirected to husbands' uses (Brody et al., 2017). This dynamic illustrates that expanding women's credit access, while necessary, is insufficient for genuine empowerment. Effective financial inclusion requires addressing the underlying household power relations that enable men to appropriate resources

Control over Agricultural Income

Control over income generated from agricultural production represents a critical dimension of resource-control with direct implications for household food security and welfare. Soh Wenda et al. (2024) found that women's decision-making over household income is associated with how resources are allocated to household food and children´s nutritional and welfare needs compared with men. Conversely, when men control household income despite women's significant labour contributions, household resources may be directed toward non-food expenditures in ways that undermine food security and child welfare (Doss et al., 2018).

Palacios-Lopez et al. (2017) document that women's farm labour is systematically unpaid or underpaid within household production systems in sub-Saharan Africa, creating what Quisumbing and Pandolfelli (2010) term the 'productivity-benefit gap': the disconnect between women's agricultural contributions and their ability to benefit from the proceeds. This gap reflects patriarchal ideology that designates men as rightful controllers of household cash income regardless of who generated it. Connors et al. (2023) demonstrate that negotiated income-sharing arrangements between spouses, wherein women control proceeds from specific crops or activities, can enhance women's agency, household cooperation, and food security outcomes.

Women's control over agricultural income and productive assets can shape household-level decisions concerning the allocation and use of resources. Existing evidence indicates that women's control over income and assets is associated with outcomes such as household dietary diversity, child nutrition, education expenditure and health-related investments (Doss et al., 2015). In the context of intra-household food production, these findings highlight the importance of examining how access to and control over agricultural income influence decisions about food production and household resource allocation.

Theoretical Framework: Liberal Feminism Theory

Liberal Feminism views gender inequality primarily through unequal opportunities, rights, access, and participation and argues that women should have equal capacity to exercise rights and participate in social, economic, and political institutions. A key concern is the existence of formal and informal barriers that prevent women from converting nominal rights into meaningful opportunities. Enyew and Mihrete (2018) explain liberal feminism as an approach concerned with equality and the removal of institutional and social barriers that restrict women's participation and opportunities.

In this study, the theory was used as a sensitising framework rather than as a claim that formal equality automatically produces equal household outcomes. The interview guide therefore included questions on formal ownership and access as well as actual decision-making, control, use, and benefits. During analysis, codes were developed around these dimensions and then examined for evidence of equality, exclusion, negotiation, and discrepancies between formal rights and lived control. This approach is particularly relevant to the cases of joint land titling and loan access. For example, a participant may hold a joint title yet experience limits in practical decision-making, while another may obtain a loan in her own name but have limited control over its use. Such cases demonstrate a limitation of a strictly formal liberal-feminist interpretation and show why legal or nominal rights must be examined alongside household power relations.

Liberal Feminism therefore provides a useful starting point for examining unequal rights and opportunities, but the findings are interpreted cautiously. The framework helps identify where women and men appear to have unequal formal or practical opportunities, while the qualitative accounts also reveal that formal rights may not translate directly into control. The study consequently does not treat the theory as proof of causal effects on food production; instead, it uses the framework to interpret participants' accounts of gendered resource relations and the institutional or household barriers surrounding them.

Method
The study employed a qualitative research design to obtain detailed accounts of gendered resource-control practices within intra-household food production in Chepalungu Sub-County. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' experiences, meanings, negotiations, and perceptions rather than to estimate population prevalence or statistically test causal relationships (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The target population comprised men and women aged between 18 and 70 years who were actively engaged in farming and household food production activities in Chepalungu Sub-County. Chepalungu Sub-County is administratively subdivided into five wards and had an estimated 30,604 households according to the (Kenya National Bureau of Stastistics, 2019).

Data were collected through semi-structured and in-depth interviews of a total of 45 participants guided by a pre-tested interview guide distributed across Kong'asis, Nyangores, Sigor, Chebunyo and Siongiroi wards and three Key Informant Interviews (KIIs).The sample comprised 23 women and 22 men, a gender expert, agricultural officer and a community leader to incorporate accounts from both genders.The interviews were personally conducted by the researcher in Kipsigis, the language preferred by participants, and lasted approximately 40–45 minutes. Three interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, while field notes were used to supplement the recorded and unrecorded interviews. Where necessary, Kipsigis responses were translated into English during transcription while preserving their intended meanings. Fieldwork was conducted between 20/11/2024 and [20/3/2025].

The guide contained questions on land ownership and access; access to and use of agricultural inputs; access to credit and control over borrowed funds; agricultural income management; household decision-making; and perceived implications of these practices for food production and household food needs. The questions deliberately distinguished ownership, access, use, management, decision-making, control, and benefit. Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis approach: familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Coding combined the study's predefined resource-control dimensions with themes emerging from participants' narratives. The analysis did not calculate prevalence estimates, test statistical associations, or measure agricultural yields, dietary diversity scores, household food security scales.

The sample was purposively varied by age, marital status, and educational background to capture different experiences of resource-control. Because the sample was purposive and qualitative, the gender composition is reported as the composition of the study sample and is not presented as evidence of prevalence in Chepalungu Sub-County.

Trustworthiness was enhanced through the use of a semi-structured interview guide, purposive selection of information-rich participants, and comparison of accounts from participants and key informants. Reflexivity was maintained by the researcher through continuous consideration of personal assumptions and interactions that could influence data interpretation. Verbatim transcription, systematic coding, field notes and documentation of methodological decisions provided an audit trail and supported dependability and confirmability. Member checking was not conducted; instead, credibility was strengthened through comparison of accounts across participants and key informants and careful documentation of the research process.

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the study prior to data collection in accordance to established ethical principles governing research involving human partcipants.The researcher obtained an approval licence from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation

(NACOSTI), under approval licence reference number 766323. Research approval was also obtained from relevant authories including the County commisioner´s office, Bomet County and Bomet University. An informed consent was obtained from all participants before interviews were conducted. Participation was voluntary, and participants could decline to answer questions or withdraw from the interview. To protect confidentiality, spousal interviews were conducted separately and privately, with each spouse interviewed individually in order to minimise the possibility of influence or interference from the other partner. This arrangement enabled participants to express their views freely and provided a safe setting for discussing gender roles, resource access and decision-making within the household. all personal names used in the original interview narratives were replaced with participant codes in this manuscript, and potentially identifying personal details were minimised. Interview information was treated as confidential and used only for the purposes of the study.

Discussion

Land Ownership and Access

Participants' accounts indicated that land ownership and decision-making were commonly described as male-dominated. Among the 45 participants, 38 reported that land used by their households was registered exclusively in the husband's name, while 7 described joint registration or registration in the wife's name. The study included both spouses from selected households where both were available and willing to participate. Each spouse was interviewed separately and privately to obtain individual perspectives on household negotiations and resource ownership.These figures describe the interviewed participants' accounts and should not be interpreted as prevalence estimates for all households in Chepalungu. Several women also described access to land as dependent on marriage or male relatives, making their practical rights more contingent than formal ownership categories might suggest.

Participant W1, a widowed woman, described her experience of losing access to land after her husband's death:

> "When my husband died, his brothers came and took most of the land. They said I am only a woman and cannot own land. They left me with a small piece where I grow vegetables and maize for my children. I cannot use the land to get a loan because it is not in my name. I feel helpless because I have no legal claim. Even the land I am using now, they can take it anytime."

Participant W1's account illustrates the distinction between access and secure control. Although she continued to use part of the land for food production, she described limited authority over its long-term security and its use as collateral. This account is consistent with the broader argument that women's land rights should be examined beyond formal ownership alone (Doss et al., 2015; Slavchevska et al., 2021).

Participants also described situations in which women could use household land but had limited authority over major land-use decisions. Some men were described as deciding which crops to plant, whether land should be rented out, and how plots should be allocated among family members.

Participant W2, a married woman, explained her position:

> "The land belongs to my husband. I can suggest what to plant, but he makes the final decision. If I want to start a project, like planting tomatoes or rearing goats, I must ask his permission. Sometimes he agrees, but other times he refuses without explanation. This makes it hard for me to plan or improve our income."

Participant W2's account shows why access, use, and control should not be treated as interchangeable. She could work on the land and suggest activities, but she did not describe herself as having final decision-making authority. This distinction is important because household authority can vary by the particular decision being considered (Anderson et al., 2017).

A contrasting account came from Participant W3, a married woman who described joint land registration:

> "My husband and I registered our land jointly. We both inherited some land from our parents and combined it. We discuss and decide together how to use it. This gives me confidence because I know I have ownership. If anything happens, my rights are protected. More couples should do this."

Participant W3's account suggests that joint registration can be experienced as strengthening security and participation in household decisions. At the same time, the account should not be treated as evidence that joint titling automatically produces equal control. The distinction between formal rights and actual decision-making remains important, particularly where household norms continue to shape how rights are exercised (Slavchevska et al., 2021; Wiig, 2013).

Access to Agricultural Inputs

Participants commonly described access to agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, and farming tools as mediated by whoever controlled household finances. Several women reported depending on husbands or other male household members to purchase inputs, while some men described themselves as responsible for market transactions and input decisions. These accounts concern access and decision-making; the interview data did not include direct measurements of input quantities or crop yields.

Participant W4 described her experience of input dependency:

> "My husband buys seeds and fertiliser. He gives me what he thinks I need for the food crops. Sometimes the seeds are old or the fertiliser is not enough. I cannot buy better quality inputs because I do not have money. If I ask him to buy more, he says we cannot afford it. But I see him spending money on other things, like going to the market or buying things for himself. If I had control over even a small amount of money, I would buy better seeds and improve our harvest."

Participant W4's account links control over purchasing decisions with her perceived ability to select inputs. Her statement about improving the harvest is a participant perception rather than a measured change in yield. The account therefore illustrates the perceived relationship between financial control and input choice without establishing a causal productivity effect.

Participant M1, a married man, described a different understanding of input management:

> "I am the one who goes to the market and knows the prices. I buy the inputs because I understand what is needed. My wife is good at planting and weeding, but she does not know about buying seeds or fertiliser. It is better if I handle those things."

Participant M1's account illustrates how household members may assign different roles to market transactions, production labour, and input decisions. Rather than interpreting this account as evidence of lower female productivity, it is more appropriate to view it as evidence of differentiated decision-making roles within the household.

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Overall, the interview accounts suggest that control over financial resources can shape who participates input-purchasing decisions. However, the study did not measure quantities of inputs used or compare harvests across households; therefore, the findings are limited to participants' descriptions of access, control, and perceived in implications for food production.

Credit access was also described as gendered, but participants' narratives showed that access to credit and control over borrowed funds were not necessarily the same. Of the 23 women interviewed, 10 reported having accessed some form of credit during the previous year, while 17 of the 22 men reported such access. These counts describe the interviewed sample only who involved an extension officer and a gender expert are not estimates of the prevalence of credit access in the wider population.

Participant W5 described her experience of financial access:

> "I am part of a chama where we save money together. When it is my turn, I receive about 10,000 shillings. This money helps me buy food, pay school fees, or start a small business-like selling vegetables. But it is not enough to buy a cow or improve the farm. My husband gets loans from the bank because our land is in his name. He uses that money for farming, but I cannot access such loans."

Participant W5's account distinguishes informal access to small amounts of finance from access to larger formal loans. The account also links land ownership to perceived ability to obtain formal credit. The study does not, however, provide independent financial records against which these perceptions can be compared.

Some women also described situations in which obtaining a loan in their own name did not guarantee control over the funds.

> "I took a loan from a microfinance group to buy chickens and start poultry farming. But my husband said we needed the money urgently for something else. He took most of it, and I only kept a small amount. Now I have to repay the loan, but the chickens I bought are too few to make enough profit. I feel trapped because I borrowed the money in my name, but I did not fully benefit from it."

Participant W6's account is important for interpreting Liberal Feminism in this study because formal access to credit did not, in her experience, translate into practical control over the borrowed funds. The case demonstrates why legal or nominal access must be distinguished from actual use and control.

Other participants described more supportive arrangements in which women were encouraged to access and use credit for household or income-generating activities.

> "I encouraged my wife to join a savings group and take loans for her projects. She started selling vegetables and now contributes to school fees. This has reduced the burden on me, and we are able to meet our needs better. More men should support their wives in accessing credit."

Participant M2's account presents a negotiated form of resource use in which the respondent perceived benefits from his wife's participation in an income-generating activity. The account is treated as a participant perception rather than as evidence that credit access caused an improvement in household welfare.

Control and Management of Agricultural Income in Chepalungu

Participants generally described control over agricultural income as a separate issue from contribution to agricultural labour. Men were often described as managing proceeds from cash crops and livestock sales, while women sometimes controlled income from smaller activities such as vegetables, eggs, or poultry. The narratives indicate differences in who made spending decisions and who could determine how agricultural proceeds were used.

Participant W7 described the disconnect she experienced between labour contribution and income decision-making:

> "I work hard on the farm throughout the season. When we harvest sweet potatoes, millet and beans, my husband sells them and keeps all the money. He buys what he thinks we need, but sometimes his priorities are different from mine. I want to buy clothes for children or save for emergencies, but he spends money on other things. I feel like I have no say in how our earnings are used, yet I contributed most of the labour."

Participant W7's account illustrates the distinction between contribution and benefit. Her narrative does not establish that male control necessarily reduces household welfare, but it shows how the allocation of decision-making authority may be experienced as unequal by a household member.

Some participants described negotiated income-sharing arrangements in which spouses-controlled proceeds from different activities.

> "My husband and I agreed that I control the income from our vegetable garden and poultry. He controls the income from maize and tea. We contribute together to household expenses. This arrangement works well because I feel I have some financial independence, and we both benefit."

Participant W8's account suggests that household resource-control can take negotiated rather than exclusively male or female forms. The case also reinforces the need to distinguish control of a particular income stream from overall household income control. The study did not independently measure expenditure patterns or dietary outcomes associated with these arrangements.

When discussing the combined role of land, inputs, credit, and income, participants commonly linked greater participation in resource decisions with their perceived ability to plan food production activities and household expenditures. These accounts indicate an experienced relationship between resource-control and food production decisions, but they do not establish a causal effect because the study did not collect yield data, harvest quantities, dietary diversity scores, validated food security measures, expenditure records, or comparative counterfactual data.

Participant W9 described how she would use greater control over income:

> "Women think about food for the family first. If I had control over income, I would make sure we have enough maize, beans, milk and vegetables before spending on other things. But men sometimes use money for things that do not benefit the family directly, like alcohol or personal needs."

Participants´statements reflect their perception of how greater control over income could affect household priorities. It should not be interpreted as evidence that women universally allocate income toward food or that men universally do otherwise. The qualitative design captures the meaning participants attach to resource-control arrangements rather than measuring actual household expenditure patterns.

Across the interviews, some participants described shared or greater female participation in resource decisions alongside perceived improvements in the planning of food crops, household needs, or small-scale agricultural activities. Other participants described continued male authority despite women's labour or nominal access to resources. The evidence therefore supports an interpretation of varied household resource-control arrangements rather than a uniform gender effect on food production.

Findings

The findings are consistent with the argument that formal rights, access, and practical control should be distinguished when examining gender relations in agriculture. They also demonstrate the limits of making causal claims from qualitative perceptions. In this study, resource-control is best understood as a set of negotiated household practices that shape how participants experience agricultural production and household decision-making.

The study found that control over productive resources within households was commonly gendered. Participants described land ownership, major decisions on agricultural inputs, access to formal credit, and management of income from some agricultural activities as areas in which men often had greater control. However, women remained substantially involved in farming activities and, in some households, participated in joint or negotiated resource management.

The findings further showed that resource relations involved different dimensions, including ownership, access, use, management, decision-making, control, and benefits. These dimensions did not always coincide. For example, women could have access to or use a resource without having final decision-making authority over it. Similarly, joint land registration did not necessarily translate into equal practical control, while access to loans did not always guarantee control over how borrowed funds were used.

Participants also described how resource-control arrangements influenced household decisions concerning food crops, agricultural inputs, credit, and household expenditures. However, the study did not establish a causal relationship between the gender of the resource controller and outcomes such as food security, dietary diversity, agricultural productivity, or household welfare. The findings therefore represent participants' experiences and perceptions within the study context rather than population-level estimates.

Finally, the findings indicated that resource-control practices varied across households. Some households continued to rely on male-dominated decision-making, while others reported joint or negotiated approaches to managing productive resources. These variations show that gender relations in intra-household food production were not uniform across the households studied and were associated with differences in how resources were accessed, managed, used, and decisions were made.

Overall, the findings show that formal ownership or access to productive resources did not necessarily translate into practical control over those resources. Resource-control was reflected in the everyday household practices through which participants accessed, used, managed, and made decisions about agricultural resources and their benefits.

Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study was conducted in Chepalungu Sub-County, Bomet County, and therefore the findings are context-specific. As a qualitative study employing purposive sampling, the findings are not intended for statistical generalisation to all households in Kenya. Rather, they provide contextual insights into gender dynamics in intra-household food production that may be transferable to settings with similar social, cultural and agricultural characteristics.

Second, the study relied primarily on participants' self-reported experiences regarding gender roles, access to and control of agricultural resources, decision-making, and participation in food production. Such accounts may be affected by recall difficulties or social desirability, particularly because household decision-making and resource-control can be sensitive issues. The study sought to minimise this limitation by assuring participants of confidentiality and using probing questions to obtain detailed accounts.

Third, qualitative interpretation necessarily involves researcher judgement. Although the data were systematically coded and analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2021) approach, interpretation may still be influenced by the researcher's engagement with the study context. This was addressed through repeated review of transcripts, systematic coding and comparison of perspectives across participants and data sources.

Despite these limitations, the study provides in-depth, contextually grounded evidence on how gender roles and resource relations shape participation in intra-household food production in the study area.

Conclusion

This study explored how men and women in Chepalungu Sub-County described gendered control of productive resources in relation to intra-household food production. The interview accounts indicate that land ownership, major input-purchasing decisions, access to formal credit, and management of income from some agricultural activities were commonly described as male-dominated. Women nevertheless reported substantial participation in farming labour and, in some households, participation in joint or negotiated resource management. The findings also show that ownership, access, use, management, decision-making, control, and benefit are distinct dimensions of resource relations and should not be treated as interchangeable.

The study does not establish that the gender of a resource controller causes better or poorer food security, dietary diversity, productivity, or household welfare. Rather, participants described how different resource-control arrangements were experienced and how they were perceived to shape decisions about food crops, inputs, credit, and household expenditures. Because the study was based on purposively selected qualitative interviews, the findings should be understood as context-specific accounts rather than population prevalence estimates or causal effects. The cases of joint land registration and loan diversion further show that formal access or ownership may not necessarily translate into practical control.

Based on these findings, this paper advances a number of recommendations. First, national and county governments should enforce existing land laws and promote joint land titling for married couples, accompanied by public awareness campaigns on women's formal land rights and accessible legal aid services for women seeking to secure land ownership. Secondly, financial institutions and microfinance organisations should develop gender-responsive loan products with collateral-free options, lower interest rates, and flexible repayment schedules tailored to women's agricultural investment cycles. Thirdly, programmes expanding women's credit access should be complemented by financial literacy training that explicitly addresses intra-household dynamics and women's rights to control borrowed funds, alongside grievance mechanisms for women experiencing loan diversion. Fourth, programmes providing agricultural inputs, credit, vouchers and other productive resources should incorporate mechanisms for monitoring both the receipt and subsequent use of resources by intended beneficiaries.This directly addresses the intra-household diversion risk identified by the study rather than relying solely on evidence general literature. Fifth, community education initiatives should address the cultural norms that restrict women's control over agricultural income, promoting negotiated income-sharing arrangements as models for equitable household resource management.

Further research should investigate the long-term effects of joint land titling programs on intra-household resource-control dynamics and food production outcomes in Chepalungu Sub-County. Additionally, research examining how digital financial services and mobile banking can enhance women's access to credit and reduce vulnerability to loan diversion would contribute important insights for programme design. Longitudinal studies tracking how resource-control dynamics evolve in response to policy interventions would further strengthen the evidence base for gender-responsive agricultural development in the region.

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